

REMARKS

Claims 1 and 2 are all the claims pending in the application.

In the Office Action, claims 1 and 2 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) as being anticipated by Eifrig (U.S. 5,974,184).

Applicants submit that the Eifrig reference is not prior art against the present application. In particular, with respect to Eifrig, Applicants note that this reference has a filing date of October 24, 1997 and claims priority to provisional applications filed on March 7, 1997 and March 31, 1997. Thus, the earliest possible effective filing date for the Eifrig reference is March 7, 1997.

In this regard, Applicants note that the three foreign priority documents (JP P8-132970, JP P8-176426 and JP P8-254677) of the present application were all filed prior to March 7, 1997. In particular, JP P8-132970 was filed on May 28, 1996, JP P8-176426 was filed on July 5, 1996, and JP P8-254677 was filed on September 26, 1996.

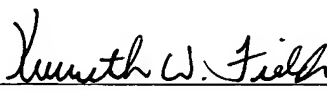
Accompanying this response are verified English translations of each of the above-noted foreign priority documents, thereby perfecting the priority dates of May 28, 1996, July 5, 1996 and September 26, 1996.

In view of the foregoing, Applicants respectfully submit that Eifrig does not qualify as prior art against the present application. As such, the above-noted rejection of claims 1 and 2 based on Eifrig should be withdrawn.

If any points remain in issue, the Examiner is kindly requested to contact the undersigned at the telephone number listed below. Otherwise, Applicants kindly request that the application be passed to issue.

Respectfully submitted,

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